



The Oxendahl Family.

Cy's Place

EMILY CHRISTOFFERSON

Have you ever had a moment when you could feel your heart drop? Have you ever received bad news that made you feel helpless? For one young expectant couple, heart-dropping and helpless feelings invaded what should have been a joyous occasion, their baby's twenty-week ultrasound. At the twenty-week checkup couples can learn the gender of their unborn baby and walk away with an ultrasound image of new life growing—a beautiful boy or girl. For Taylor and Rebecca Oxendahl of Williston, North Dakota, their incredible

picture was of twins, but it also revealed a heart-breaking anomaly.

Taylor had used his lunch break to attend the ultrasound appointment, but had to return to work prior to the consultation with the doctor. Shortly after his return, he got an emotional call from Rebecca. "I could tell right away that something was wrong," said Taylor. "When Rebecca was visiting with the doctor after the ultrasound, the doctor said that one of the babies' hearts wasn't developing... that it looked small." The couple was concerned.

A specialist was flown in from Fargo, North Dakota to confirm the diagnosis. One of their children had Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome, or HLHS. This condition is a rare congenital heart defect in which the left side of the heart is very underdeveloped. The heart is then unable to adequately supply the required oxygenated blood to the rest of the body. As a result of this complex conclusion, the Oxendahls were told that no physician in the state of North Dakota could help them. Instead they would be forced to uproot their family and move

Cy's Place: An Expanded Vision



A 3-D rendering of the vision for a new pediatric transplant home in Rochester, Minnesota.

Due to the immense need for housing, the Ericksons see the need to expand the vision of Cy's Place to a much grander plan.

The new vision includes plans to provide for the needs of immunosuppressed pediatric transplant patients and their families. Land has already been acquired and architectural designs have already been drawn.

The project is now in a fundraising stage. If you would like to learn more about how you can support this effort, visit:

www.cysplace.org

to Rochester, Minnesota for the birth of the twins and for the extended care that the birth would require. In October, after a long day of meeting with specialists at the Mayo clinic, the Oxendahls began looking for a place to stay. They contacted the Ericksons, friends they had met in Williston years earlier.

When Randy and Ree Erickson were living in Williston, they too had experienced a pediatric medical crisis. Their two-year-old son, Silas, was diagnosed with Neuroblastoma, a type of childhood cancer that starts in the nerve tissue and generally develops around the adrenal glands above the kidneys. The Ericksons were also compelled to come to Mayo Clinic for treatment, struggling with caring for a sick child while at the same time providing for the needs of everyday life. After a year-long battle, Silas (or Cy as he was endearingly called) passed away at the age of three. This tragedy set the Ericksons on an unexpected path. Randy and Ree felt God's call to relocate in Rochester to establish a ministry for families with critically ill children. In January 2013, they applied for and received non-profit status, purchasing a home near Mayo Clinic with the capacity to house a family downstairs. That lower level became affectionately known as Cy's Place.

After receiving Taylor's call and hearing of the Oxendahls' need, the Ericksons responded that Cy's Place had recently been vacated and was

available. Gunnar and Carter were born January 7 without incident, and Gunnar was transferred to the NICU. Within a week he underwent a surgery known as the Norwood Procedure, which will be followed by two more surgeries in the coming years. During the recovery process Gunnar developed an infection in chest tissue. The surgical team was able to remove the infection and is hopeful that they can minimize scar tissue in a future procedure. But this is just one of many complications for Gunnar, ranging from needing his chest to stay open after surgery, to re-intubating him after a few hours of breathing on his own.

Taylor often compares this journey to walking up a sand dune, two steps forward and one step back. These surgeries are not a cure for HLHS, and a heart transplant is definitely a future possibility. The Oxendahls' prayer is that the planned procedures will improve Gunnar's health and allow him to live a fruitful, hopeful life. Thankful to have a place to live during these difficult times, the Oxendahls have come to know Cy's Place as "a home away from home."

Due to the immense need of housing for families like the Oxendahls, the Ericksons see the need to expand the vision of Cy's Place to a much grander plan with the guidance of an advising board. The new vision includes plans to provide for the needs of immunosuppressed pediatric transplant patients and their families—a sterile environment to call

home. Land has already been acquired and architectural designs drawn for the 20-apartment complex. Now in the fundraising stage, construction can begin when the necessary funding level is reached. Please keep this vision of Cy's Place in your prayers and consider investing in the needs of these families through your donations.

As we celebrate the new lives of Gunnar and Carter Oxendahl, we look for hope in the promises that God has given us and we trust in his ultimate provision. Although many families struggle with finding goodness in the midst of despair, the Oxendahls' relationship with Christ has given them immense hope in the middle of darkness. After options are spent, and medical professionals have done all that they can, it is often then that we drop to our knees and realize everything is ultimately in God's hands. This life-giving God loves deeply each and every one of these children who, like Gunnar, are fighting for their lives. He also loves those who fight with them. Our plans may not go the way we believed they would, but when we let go and trust him, they turn into God's loving plan. And isn't that so much sweeter?

Emily Christofferson is the niece of Randy and Ree Erickson. She lives in Bozeman, Montana.